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ABSTRACT

The results of a project which investigated the speech of black respondents enrolled in the intermediate grades are described. From the data, materials and audio tapes were developed that could be used in helping preservice and inservice teachers identify morphological and syntactic features of black dialect. The concepts used in developing the materials were that (1) enough people speak black dialect to give credence to the thesis that they comprise a separate and distinct speech community; (2) there is systematic variety in the kind of English which these persons speak; and (3) black dialect speakers frequently alternate between general academic English practices and those of the variant dialect. Thirteen speech features were studied, including the omission of "s" to indicate the third person singular, the formation of the past and perfect tense of verbs, zero copula, auxiliary "be," negative "be," formation of the plurals of nouns, formation of the possessive case of nouns, the pronominal appositive, variant forms of pronouns, the existential "it," multiple negation, overinflection, and inverted word order in indirect questions. (HOD)

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The Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville Protocol Materials Development Project

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The purpose of the Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville Protocol Materials Development Project was to produce audio tapes and duplicated materials which will be useful in helping pre-service and in-service teachers identify selected morphological and syntactic features of Black Dialect.[1] The materials as developed are based on these general concepts:

1. Enough people speak Black Dialect to give credence to the thesis that they comprise a separate and distinct speech community.
2. There is systematic variety in the kind of English which these persons speak.
3. Black dialect speakers frequently alternate between General English practices and those of the variant dialect.

After studying the findings of reputable linguists who have concerned themselves with Black Dialect, those who developed the protocols chose thirteen features which they hoped to find in the speech of the one hundred respondents who were taped in the SIUE broadcasting studios and in that of the four hundred who were taped in their classrooms. The thirteen speech features which were chosen may be listed as follows:

1. Omission of s to indicate the third person singular
2. Formation of the past tense of verbs and of the perfect tense
3. Zero copula
4. Auxiliary be
5. Negative be
6. Formation of the plurals of nouns
7. Formation of the possive case of nouns
8. The pronominal appositive
9. Variant forms of pronouns

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[1]The Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville Protocol Materials Development Project was sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education. Those who developed the fourteen audio tapes and the duplicated materials are Dr. W. Bryce VanSyoc, Dr. Gordon Wood, and the writer. All are professors at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

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10. The existential it
11. Multiple negation
12. Overinflection in nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs
13. Inverted word order in indirect questions

The respondents were all enrolled in the intermediate grades of the East St. Louis public schools. It was thought that those in the middle elementary school grades would be the best subjects for two reasons. In the first place, younger children might have had speech characteristics which grew out of maturation problems, rather than out of their use of a given linguistic system. In the second place, children on this grade level, while inescapably untouched by the language of the school, must necessarily have retained a sufficient amount of their "at home" speech to give an adequate sampling of its morphological and syntactic characteristics.

The four hundred children who were taped in their classrooms gave stand-up speeches in which they discussed some subject in which they were interested. However, no excerpts from these speeches were included in the audio tapes, which along with the duplicated materials, make up the body of protocols. It was impossible to do so because of the usual classroom noises which made them unsuitable. Hence, they served solely as supportive data. Only the free flow conversations, interviews, and the reading responses of the one hundred children who were brought to the Southern Illinois University campus furnished the examples which are used in the final product.

Although it was not the purpose of the Project to go beyond the level of merely presenting the speech features in such a manner as to facilitate an indentification thereof, the developers decided that certain pertinent data were significant enough to warrant inclusion. Thus in both the tapes and the guide, references are made to linguistic phenomena in such a way as to enhance a listener's appreciation and understanding of the morphology and syntax of the variant dialect. For example, the fact that none of the respondents used Black Dialect forms exclusively but tended to alternate between the systems of that

dialect and those of the General Dialect is constantly referred to and illustrated.

In fact, perhaps, it is not too far wrong to suggest that it is entirely possible that this reaffirmation of the tendency of Black Dialect speakers to move freely between their own first dialect and the prestige dialect in their usage might be the most important contribution of the SIUE Project to American dialectology. An analysis of the speeches of two respondents will clarify this assertion. An interviewer showed the respondents a number of pictures of various kinds of workmen, professionals, etc. They were then asked to tell who the persons pictured were and what kind of work they engaged in.

First Respondent: He is a janitor, and he mop_ floors. He is a baker, and he bakes cakes and pies (very soft s). He is a life guard, and he save_ people_ life (not "lives".)

Second Respondent: He is a mailman, and he delivers mails (sic). He is a barber, and he fixes people_ hair. He is a milkman. He deliver_ milk to people_ house.

It will be noticed that the first respondent chose to use the Black Dialect form of the noun zero plural only once, whereas he used the General Dialect form twice. In addition, he used one noun zero possessive, and no over inflections, although he did use the zero third person singular, which speech feature has also been attributed to the variant dialect. Thus in twenty-eight words, the speaker elected to form the plurals of his nouns in accordance with the principles of the academically acceptable dialect two to one over the use of the corresponding Black Dialect form. On the other hand, he used a zero noun possessive in the one instance in which he had to form the possessive case. In no instance did he overinflect, as did the next respondent, but he did choose to omit the s signal twice in the three instances in which he used the third person singular present tense.

On the other hand, and possibly because there was no need for him to form the plurals of nouns, the second respondent did not use the noun zero plural at all. However he did use the noun zero possessive twice, overinflection twice, and the zero third person singular once, while he chose the more standard form of that verb tense twice. This means that in twenty-seven words, the second respondent chose to use a linguistic feature which has been designated as being characteristic of Black Dialect four times and a General Dialect form twice in instances in which he had to indicate the relationship of a given word to others within a sentance. Taken together, the respondents show a small preference for the variant dialect, having chosen to use eight of its morphological forms out of a total of thirteen instances in which such forms were needed.

Likewise, an analysis of even larger segments of the studio taped materials will support the assertion that Black Dialect speakers use freely the grammatical forms of either of the two major social dialects in the United States, often within the same sentence, as does this respondent, who, in discussing her favorite television show, "I Dream of Jeannie," said of the major character's boy friend, "Uh...he always...goes upon the moon and stuff, and Jeannie's always helping him when he get_ into trouble." It will be noted that the speaker used the inflected form of the third person present tense in the first part of her sentence but that she used the zero third person singular in the last. The extent to which Black Dialect speakers alternate between the principles of the variant dialect and those of the General Dialect may also be seen in the fact that in a forty-five minute taped sequence, eight children used a verb in its simple form thirty times out of the sixty-one times when the third person singular present tense was used. The statistics would seem to indicate that in these instances the respondents chose to use a Black Dialect morphological form roughly fifty percent of the time. This "nick and tuck" race between Black Dialect usage and that of General Dialect may also be seen in a three minute

taped sequence in which four children used the noun zero possessive six times, while they followed the more academically acceptable practice of adding the s signal to indicate possession nine times.

The SIUE Protocol Materials Development Project seems to support the contention of those who believe that the most distinguishing morphological characteristics of Black Dialect lie in its verb system, as is evidenced by the large number of instances in which the respondents used verb forms which deviate from those of the General Dialect. The first most frequent deviation in verb usage was that of the "zero third person singular," which term simply means that the writer or speaker does not add the s signal to the simple form of his verb as a means of indicating the tense and number implied therein. The extent to which this practice is adhered to by Black Dialect speakers has already been indicated above.

The second distinguishing characteristic of verb usage in Black Dialect is the use of the "zero copula"; that is, the speakers of this variety of American English feel free to omit certain helping verbs, such as is, was, were, etc. Hence one speaking this dialect might say, "What you doing, Juanita?", whereas the speaker of the General dialect would say "What are you doing, Juanita?" At times Black Dialect speakers do not omit their copulas entirely but seem to try to make an accommodation between the General Dialect and that of their own. As a result, they might say "I's Superman" in which case the copula is overinflected and then contracted. It is indeed interesting to notice that the decendents of the former American slaves who colonized Liberia in 1847 also frequently, quite frequently, use the zero copula, for example, "I coming."

A third recurring linguistic phenomenon which was brought out in the SIUE Project was the ommission of the suffix ed as a means of indicating the past.

Perhaps closely allied to this usage is the fourth distinguishing characteristic verb usage, that of not adding the ed signal in the formation of the past perfect tense. Two examples of the omission of the past tense signal, ed, follow: "Yesterday, my father cook_ macaroni and sweet potatoes and cook_ some cornbread, and then we drunk some tea" and "Last night I wash_ the baby diaper." Here is an example of the omission of the ed in the formation of the past perfect tense: "I talk_ to him."

The greatest difficulty which the developers of the Project experienced was tne effort to secure examples of the respondents' ways of forming the perfect tenses, since during taping session after taping session, the respondents continued to use the simple form of ~~the verb~~ their verbs; rarely did they use any other. Finally, out of desperation, the developers decided to give them the past participles of certain verbs and to ask the respondents to use them in sentences. Here is a segment of a transcript on which this procedure was used:

Interviewer: O.K. Now, I'm trying to think of a verb I heard yesterday that was very, very well used. Let's see. Frozen. Frozen.

First Respondent: My car tie froze, froze yesterday.

Interviewer: O.K. Now, you said froze, John. New let me hear what you would say for frozen, Lena.

Second Respondent: When we put the food in the ice box, it be frozen.

Interviewer: Good. What would say for frozen?

Third Respondent: The ice was frozen.

Interviewer: O.K. What would you say for...oh...I'm trying to think of this verb...not frozen...There's another...How about torn? Torn. Torn. Jim?

Fourth Respondent: That boy tore my kite.

Interviewer: You said tore. I want torn, torn, Jim.

Fourth Respondent: I torn my shirt on a nail.

Interviewer: How about you Connie? Torn.

Fifth Respondent: My sister torn the bed spread.

It would seem to be significant that even after the interviewer gave them the past participial forms, only one respondent used them with a helping verb. Otherwise, they simply used the past participles as if they were the past tense forms.

This discussion of the lack of frequent recurrence of the perfect tenses among the Black Dialect speakers who participated in the SIUE Project should not be taken to mean that none of them were capable of indicating time sequences with precision. For example, here is a lively excerpt in which a respondent talks about his favorite television show, Gilligan's Island. It may be noted that although he uses the past perfect tense, he does not use the General past participal form of the verb catch, but, instead, adds the ed signal which is used in indicating that tense in the formation of the majority of English verbs:

> Respondent: They marooned on a desert island, and they, everytime somebody come there and they leave without getting them. And then they all get mad at Gilligan. And one time it was about this gorilla man. He wasn't really no gorilla man. And he had ketchered (sic). He had, he had ketchered by a gorilla. Gilligan he dressed up like he was gorilla. Then the gorilla start running after Gilligan. Then Ape Man, he were running. He dropped his tape recorder...And the man left without telling them to come with him.

Another interesting finding of those who developed the protocols was the use of a helping verb with the past tense form of the verb to indicate a perfect tense as in this sentence, "Somebody else had wrote the problem down."

A high frequency also occurred in the use of the invariable be. Thus whereas the speakers of the General Dialect would use the inflected forms of the verb--is, am, are, was, were, been--those who use the variant dialect use the uninflected form to indicate the progressive verb constructions, the future, or even to indicate an unspecified time, as in "They don't be thinking about what's happening."

An interesting sidenote to the respondents' use of this linguistic form

occurred during a taping session. The developers, wanting to make sure that they had a sufficient enough number of examples of the invariant be for the making of the final tapes, decided that they would engage the respondents in a conversation which they hoped would lead to such a heated exchange that the respondents, having been emotionally aroused, would be inclined to use the language patterns which they normally use. After all, there was always a bit of suspicion among those who worked with the project that the children were quite conscious of the fact that their teachers were present and that, therefore, they had to use "good English." The suspicion would seem to have had some vaildity in the light of this incident.

The session started off lamely, heating up as time went on and as the respondents talked about games, etc. Then two things happened. One of the developers started using the invariant be and other characteristic Black Dialect linguistic features; then the teachers of the respondents, picking up this cue, also started using the variant dialect. At the same time, the interviewer introduced an interesting subject: what would they do if the situation were reversed and they were their teachers and their teachers were their students? Almost immediately, the respondents began using an ~~abundancy~~ abundance of Black Dialect morphological and syntactic features, as this quotation will indicate:

> Respondent: Well, well, if I was a teacher just for one day, well, just for one day, everytime I'd look at a teacher I'd be ready to whip them. I'd pay them back for what they gave us. And if they'd say one word, I'd get them, because I'd be thinking about what did they did to us. And when we don't even do nothing, they treat us wrong!

The lack of inflectional endings in Black Dialect is to a lesser degree also evident in the omission of the s signals to indicate the plurals and the possessives of nouns. Numerous examples of the noun zero plural and of the noun zero possessive may be found throughout the transcripts of the master tapes. However, it must be remembered that the respondents did not use either

of these forms consistently but, instead, alternated between them and the corresponding ones in the General Dialect, as these sentences will show:

Respondent: I went over to my friend_ house, and we played some basketball. Thirty-two game_.

Respondent: You play with two ropes. And then you start throwing: when one go up, one go down. When you miss, you got to get out of the rope_.

The first respondent's use of the noun zero plural is evidence of the fact that in using Black Dialect, a speaker need not add an s signal to a noun preceded by a quantifier.

One studying the transcripts of the tapes cannot help but notice how frequently a soft s is indicated. This means, of course, that some respondents pronounced there s signals so softly that they are barely audible.

While this might be considered a phonological problem it would seem to have general implications for an understanding of the speech patterns of some Black Dialect speakers. For example, the use of the soft s might mean that these speakers sometimes operate in a somewhat indeterminate linguistic stage between their first dialect and their second.

At any rate, although the respondents often refrained from inflecting their nouns and verbs, they frequently overinflected not only words which fall into these two categories, but also adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns. Hence statements with such words as peoples, mens, and feets, more uglier, most prettiest, etc., abound, while mines was used less frequently and fastly but once during approximately ten hours of taping. The respondents also overinflected many of their verbs. Here is one of the most colorful illustrations of this usage: "I likes the way he click his rifle." Notice that whereas the speaker overinflects his first verb, he does not inflect his second as a speaker of the General Dialect would be expected to do. In trying to identify possible reasons for overinflection in Black Dialect, the developers speculated that the phenomenon might be the result of hypercorrection.

The protocol materials also reaffirm the occurrence of another characteristic of the variant dialect which linguists have identified -- the use of pronominal forms which deviate from those of the General Dialect. The first of these is the pronominal appositive, commonly referred to as the double subject, for example, "My mother she can't stand all that noise." Infrequently, the respondents used a nominative pronoun in place of a possessive, as in "He friend dribbling," and "They waiting for they turn." Few instances of the existential it were found, possibly because the respondents began their sentences with a conjunction, such as and, or with the subjects. Because they used expletives sparingly, the developers found it necessary to have them read sentences beginning with it or with there, with the respondents making the choice as to which sentence sounded best to them. The General Dialect form was chosen in roughly half of the instances.

Another characteristic feature of Black Dialect which is exemplified in the protocols is that of multiple negation. Whereas a speaker of the General Dialect would avoid using no, with such words as nor, not, but, hardly, only, scarcely, etc., speakers of the variant dialect often use as many as three of the negative elements in one sentence. A study of the speech samples of the children who were the respondents in the Project will show that the usage follows definite morphological patterns. For example, a speaker using an indefinite pronoun, "anyone," or "anybody," for example, will attach the negative element to the pronoun, thereby producing "nobody." This sentence illustrates this practice: "Nobody didn't see us do it." In addition, in sentences in which the subject contains a noun or definite pronoun, the negative is attached to the first word in the verb phrase, and may be reflected in the first noun phrase following the verb. This sentence provides an example of this usage: "I don't play for no team." Multiple negation is often used with the invariant be, as in "Some boys they don't be paying no attention." Examples of other ways

in which Black Dialect speakers use multiple negation are given and explained in the protocols.

The use of inverted word order in indirect questions is the principal syntactic feature discussed and exemplified in the audio tapes and in the duplicated materials. Illustrations of the use of this feature did not occur with great frequency. However, there were some respondents who did place their subjects after their verbs instead of before them in information indirect questions, such as "I wonder has anyone ever been on a train?" When they used indirect questions which demanded a yes or no response, the respondents tended to use inverted word order and to omit if and whether, which words the speaker of the General Dialect would use, for example, "He was seeing if he could make a fly into a human." On the other hand, one of our respondents said, "He was seeing could he make a fly into a human." Likewise, whereas a speaker of the General Dialect would say, "John asked whether there is air on the moon, " one of our respondents in a reading test chose this setence, "Bobby wonder is it air on the moon."

Some of those who participated in the field testing program of the protocols have asked to what extent the speech of the respondents is truly representative of that of those in other geographical areas who speak the variant dialect. Perhaps, then, it is in order to point out that although the participants live in East St. Louis, Illinois, and, thus, represent speakers of a local dialect, their ancestors come from the South, as did those of many blacks in other geographical areas. This would seem to indicate that the speech patterns of the respondents had their roots in such states as Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, etc., and that, as such, they might well be representative of the language of certain blacks throughout the United States.